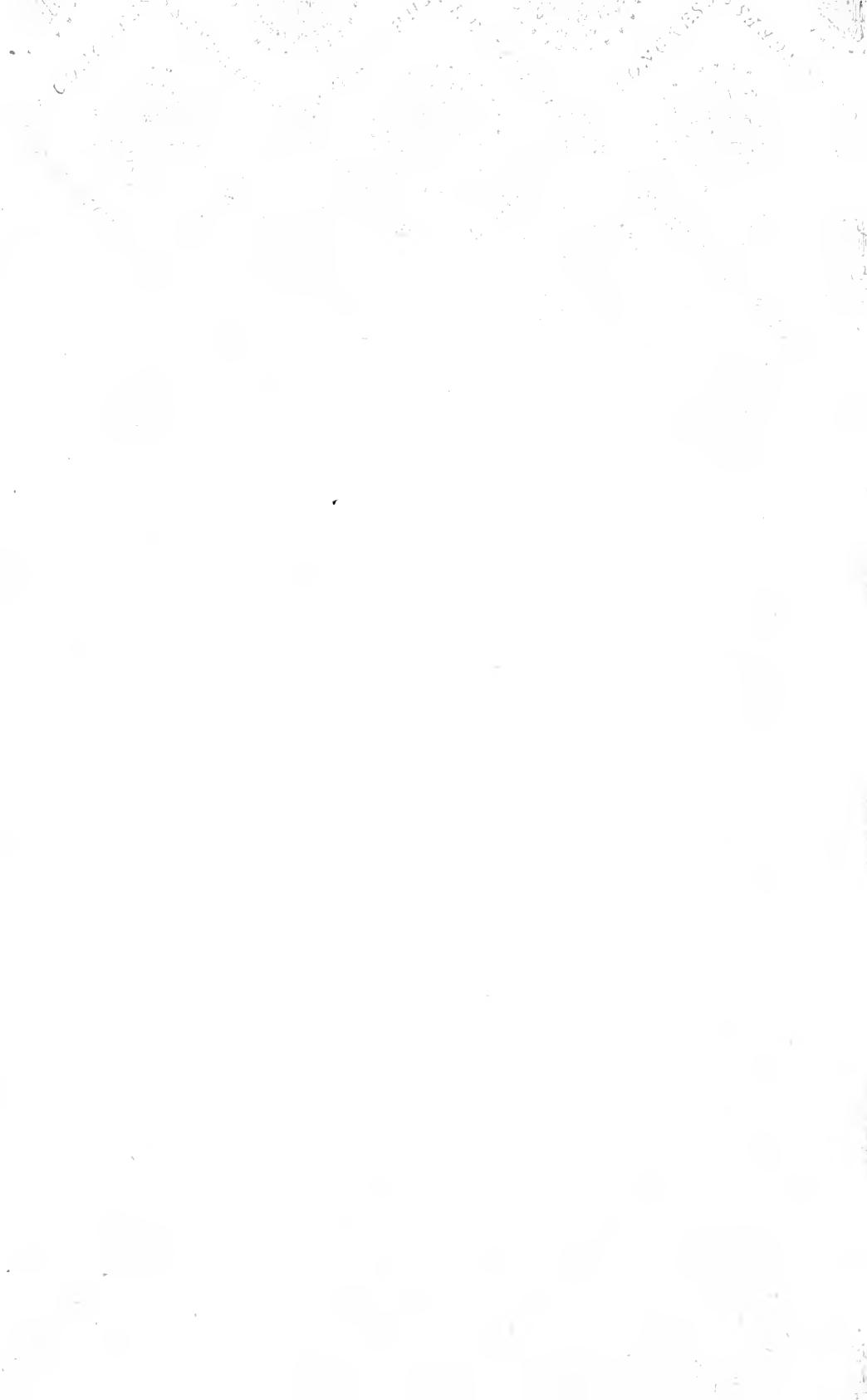
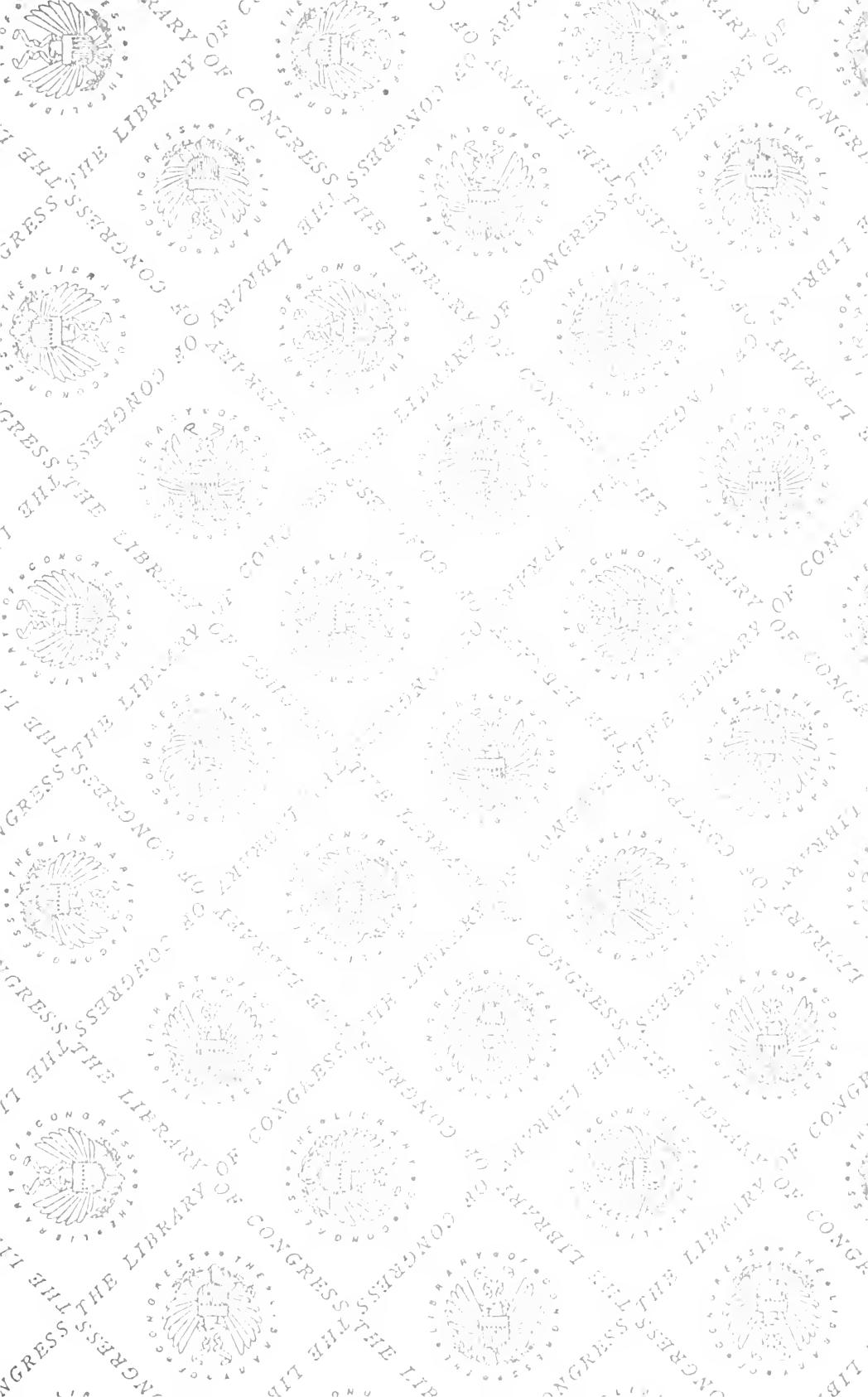


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# “The Oldest House in the United States”

St. Augustine, Fla.

An examination of the St. Augustine Historical Society's claim that its house on St. Francis Street was built in the year 1565 by the Franciscan Monks

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# “The Oldest House in the United States”

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## THE PURPOSE OF THE INQUIRY.

ST. AUGUSTINE is famed as the oldest town in the United States. Because of its age one looks for old things. The visiting tourist expects to find relics of the distant past, material tokens of the city's romantic history. But except for the Fort, the Gateway and the narrow streets, there are no such reminders here. In the absence of genuine antiquities, mercenary ingenuity has invented spurious ones. The stranger knowing no better accepts the false for the true.

Under these circumstances an extensive and flourishing system of faking has been developed to coax the coin from the winter tourist. As a rule, the inventors and promoters of the fakes are not natives nor old-time residents.\* Not being of St. Augustine stock, they have no pride in the town to make them jealous of its good name. They are not in the least troubled that their dishonest practices give the town notoriety as a city of fakes. They tell their revenue-producing lies with such assurance and repetition that some of the home folks themselves after a time accept the frauds, and not only grant the fakers immunity, but when the fakes are attacked rally to the defense of them and cry out that the business interests of the town are in jeopardy.

This was just what happened last winter when I published an article on the “Fakes of St. Augustine,” and at the next meeting of the Board of Trade excited members (including the City Manager) took the floor to denounce the “attack,” and at a meeting of the Historical Society the wail went up that “every business interest of St. Augustine had been damaged.” The fakes, it will be noted, are “business interests.”

There is an organization which bears the name of the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science. Notwithstanding the conventional import of such a title, the Society exploits the most audacious of the “oldest house” fakes. The anomaly of the situation is to be

explained by one of two assumptions: Either the St. Augustine Historical Society is so ignorant of St. Augustine history and so credulous, as honestly to accept the lies told to it and by it told to others about the age of its St. Francis street house; or else the Society knows the history of St. Augustine, knows therefore that the story of the age of

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\*The individual who is the chief promoter of and profiter by the Society's St. Francis street house enterprise and to whom the Society farms out its commercialization of Fort Marion is a person who is not a citizen of St. Augustine nor of Florida.

the house is a lie, and yet for its own reasons sponsors the date and hoaxes the public. It is for the Society to tell us which of the two assumptions it would have us adopt as the one more in keeping with the character and dignity of a historical society.



In the spring of 1920, visiting St. Augustine after an absence of some years, I found flourishing there three varieties of fakes for tourists. In the Florida Standard Guide and in an article in Mr. Foster's Travel Magazine (January, 1921) I described what I had seen and heard—the Ponce de Leon mission cross fake, the string of lies told by the Society's guide who conducted my party through the Fort, and two of the oldest house fakes, in particular that of the Historical Society on St. Francis street. Events in the city's history were recalled and historical authorities were cited to demonstrate that the Ponce de Leon mission and the oldest house were fictions; and the suggestion was made that the mercenary deceptions ought to be suppressed for the sake of the city's good name.

The action which followed on the part of the Historical Society was reported in the St. Augustine Evening Record of March 9:

"At a regular meeting of the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science, held in the reading rooms of the Hotel Ponce de Leon Tuesday evening, Chauncey M. Depew, of New York, president of the organization, presided, and . . . put the question, unanimously carried, placing the Society on record as not disposed to dignify the alleged slanderous articles of C. B. Reynolds with a reply, but to again assert to the world the belief of the St. Augustine Historical Society members that the dates and data it sets forth are right and correct, cannot be disproved, and are as near the facts as true lovers of history can establish from meagre historical records and priceless traditions handed down from father to son."

The Record of April 12th published a letter in which I said:

"I assume that we are all sincerely desirous of establishing the truth about the Historical Society's house on St. Francis street and about the Ponce de Leon coquina cross. As one step toward that end I suggest that a committee of investigation be selected, say of five members, three to be named by the Historical Society and the Board of Trade and two by me. My only stipulation is that no individual who is personally making money out of the Society's activities shall have place on the committee. I will very gladly submit my evidences, drawn from the contemporaneous records of the time, which I think will show beyond any dispute the falsity of the claims which have been called in question by me, namely, that the house on St. Francis street was built

by Franciscan monks in 1565, and that the coquina cross belonged to a religious mission established by Ponce de Leon in 1513.

"I invite the Historical Society and the Board of Trade to join with me in such an endeavor to establish the truth, and I request that the findings of the committee may be given publication in the Record."

And I added that I thought I had "a right to expect the support of the citizens of the town, the Board of Trade and all members of the Historical Society who are solicitous for the ascertainment of the truth."



The Historical Society and the Board of Trade having declined my invitation for an inquiry into the truth of the matters under review, I am now submitting to a wider consideration, with respect to the St. Francis street house, what I had intended to lay before the committee. In essential respects it is a repetition of what was said in the article on "The Fakes of St. Augustine," but with more detail and with citations of chapter and verse for the historical sources quoted. It was intended also to submit to the committee the several works referred to that the correctness of the references might be verified. Those who are interested will doubtless find the volumes in the library of the Historical Society, though it is difficult to reconcile the Society's having them with the curious notion held by the members that we are obliged to rely on priceless traditions handed down from father to son.

## SOME HELPFUL DATES.

- 1565. Pedro Menendez establishes St. Augustine.
- 1586. Francis Drake burns St. Augustine.
- 1665. John Davis burns St. Augustine.
- 1702. Governor Moore burns St. Augustine.
- 1763. Florida is ceded to Great Britain. Spanish leave. English occupy St. Augustine.
- 1783. Florida is retroceded to Spain. English leave. Spanish occupy St. Augustine.
- 1821. Florida ceded to United States. Spanish leave. St. Augustine becomes an American town.

## THE HOUSE ON ST. FRANCIS STREET.

In the year 1882 G. F. Acosta, administrator of the estate of Mrs. E. A. Acosta, petitioned the Court for an order to sell the lot at the corner of Marine and St. Francis streets, for the benefit of the infant owners. The petition drawn by his attorney, C. M. Cooper, set up that the large lot had its greatest value from its frontage on Marine street, that it was vacant except for an old dilapidated house rented to negroes, "from which no more had been received than money to pay the taxes, and at times not enough to pay the taxes," and that "the property as it stands yields no rent."

The Court having granted the order of sale, the lot was sold; the building on it was rehabilitated from its negro occupancy, and was enlarged, extended both on the east and on the west, and variously altered. Shortly thereafter it was used by the new owner for the business of oldest house. Succeeding owners exploited it for the same purpose, and in 1918 the business was taken over by the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science. Because of the prestige given by its name the Society has largely developed the business, for the popular notion of a historical society leads the average person to accept as fact what such a society says on a historical subject. The tens of thousands of persons who have visited the Society's house on St. Francis street presumably have believed the statement because made by a "historical society," that the house was built by Franciscan monks in 1565 and is the oldest house in the United States.

Like every historical assertion made by a historical society, this one is a legitimate subject of examination, to test its accuracy. Such an examination if thoroughly and honestly made will disclose whether the Society's claim for the antiquity of the house is based on historic truth, or whether the building in its character of "oldest house" is the fake that I said it was in my article on "The Fakes of St. Augustine."

It is such an inquiry that I propose to make in the pages which follow.

## THE RECORDS.

The year 1565, when the Society says its house was built, was the year in which Pedro Menendez de Aviles established Fort St. Augustine. It was long ago, but the records of the time are available. Contemporary accounts were written by Mendoza(1), who was Menendez's chaplain, and by Meras(2), brother-in-law of Menendez and official chronicler of the enterprise. Menendez(3) himself wrote long letters to the King and to others. Barrientos(4), who was a friend of Menendez's, wrote a history based on Menendez's own official report to the King. Barcia(5) in a later work drew his material from original sources. The "Unwritten History" compiled by Miss A. M. Brooks(6) contributes to our information. In these several records may be found material to determine the points at issue.

(1) Relacion hecha por el Capellan de Armada Francisco Lopez de Mendoza, del viaje que hizo el Adelantado Pedro Menendez de Aviles a la Florida.

(2) Memorial que hizo el Doctor Gonzalo Solis de Meras de todas las jornadas y sucesos del Adelantado Pedro Menendez de Aviles, su cuñado, y de la Conquista de la Florida y Justicia que hizo en Juan Ribao y otros franceses.

(3) Cartas de Pedro Menendez de Aviles.

The three foregoing are reprinted in Eugenio Rudiaz y Caravia's "La Florida, su conquista y colonizacion por Pedro Menendez de Aviles," Madrid, 1893. The references to the several works are to the pages of the Rudiaz volumes in which they are printed.

(4) Vida y hechos de Pero Menendez de Auiles... Compuesta por el maestro barrientos, Catredatico de salamanca, 1568. In Dos Antiquas Relaciones de la Florida publicadas por primera vez por Genaro Garcia, Mexico, 1902.

(5) Ensayo Cronologico para la Historia General de la Florida, por Don Gabriel de Cardenas z Cano [Barcia], Madrid, 1723.

(6) The Unwritten History of St. Augustine, copied from the Spanish Archives in Seville, Spain, by Miss A. M. Brooks, and translated by Mrs. Annie Averette, St. Augustine.

How the St. Augustine Historical Society esteemed the work of Miss Brooks was told by President De Witt Webb in his address before the Society, March 14, 1917: "In alluding to the early members of the Society, I should have mentioned as among the most active and valuable, the labors of Miss A. M. Brooks. Her book, 'The Unwritten History of St. Augustine,' is of the greatest value, and all her work for the Society... was devoted to its best interests." (Year Book, 1916-1917, page 8.)

(7) Souvenir of the Two Oldest Relics in the United States: Oldest House and Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Fla. Illustrated in colors with history. Published under the auspices of the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science. 1920. This is quoted, not for historical data, but for the Society's statements respecting the age of the house. The audacious mendacity of the booklet gives it an unique place among publications of historical societies.

## THE SOCIETY'S CLAIMS RESPECTING THE HOUSE.

Concerning its house the St. Augustine Historical Society makes the following assertions:

The sign on the outside of the building at the entrance reads:

"The Oldest House in the United States under three flags, St. Francis Street, St. Augustine, Florida.

"It is recorded in the archives of the Church that this house was occupied by the monks of St. Francis from 1565 to 1590.

"The chapel they used can still be seen.

"In 1590 it came into possession of a deputy of the Spanish Government and descended in the same family until 1882. The present owner has documents proving this."

In the circular distributed to tourists is said:

"The Oldest House was erected in the year 1565 by the Franciscan monks. There are other old houses, but this is the OLDEST. To avoid being disappointed, look for the sign on the door. 'Oldest House in the U. S., property of Historical Society of St. Augustine.' If you do not see this sign, you are not at the oldest house, on St. Francis street."

The booklet sold in the house and elsewhere, entitled "Souvenir of the Two Oldest Relics in the United States," sets forth:

### "OLDEST HOUSE IN THE UNITED STATES, "ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA.

"This building is owned by the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science.

"It was used by the monks who came with Pedro Menendez, the founder of St. Augustine, in 1565, and was occupied by them until the completion of the larger coquina monastery across the street in 1590.

"From that time until comparatively recent years it has been the home of many noted Spanish, English and American families.

"After a careful investigation extending over more than a year, of records, data and maps, from Spain, the British Museum and the archives at Washington, the antiquity of this building was established to the satisfaction of the Historical Society and Institute of Science, and in order that it might be properly preserved for future generations, was purchased by it on November 15, 1918.

"The walls of the house are of coquina and the lower floors of coquina mortar.

"The largest room on the upper floor was the chapel. At the rear of the upper floor is a small room in which the monks slept. [The lec-

turer adds that the monks contemplated the coffin-shaped ceiling for penance.]

"In the main living room is a very large open fireplace, which now, as in the days of long ago, radiates a cheerful glow on cool days.

"The old circular well at the rear of the house, blessed by the Franciscan monks, has a never-ending interest for the tourist. There is a tradition that he who makes a wish while looking into this well will have it granted within a year."

A sign on the wall in the large upper room tells us:

"This room was the chapel used by the Franciscan monks from 1565 to 1590. The floor and ceiling are original and of cedar."

There is shown a *prie dieu* or prayer bench which the souvenir booklet explains "was used by the Franciscan monks during their occupancy of this house."

The Society says that traditions attaching to the house justify its claims of age for the building.

## EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIETY'S CLAIMS.

Claim A—That the house was built in 1565 by Franciscan Monks.

Menendez sailed from Cadiz June 29th, 1565, with eleven ships, in advance of the rest of the fleet. With him were seven priests, three of whom deserted at Porto Rico. (Mendoza, Vol. II, page 437.) He proceeded to Florida without waiting for the other squadrons.

The missionaries who were enlisted in the expedition, including eleven Franciscan friars and one lay brother, a friar of the Order of Mercy, a priest and eight members of the Order of Jesus, sailed later with Pedro Menendez Marquez and Esteban de las Alas. (Meras, Vol. I, page 63. Barcia, page 69.) They were delayed by storms and many of the ships turned back. The record does not show how many of the Franciscans if any reached Havana with Menendez Marquez in December, 1565, or with Las Alas in January, 1566.

From St. Augustine Menendez went to Cuba in November, 1565, and wrote to the King from Matanzas, December 5, 1565: "I found at Havana . . . Pedro Menendez Marquez, my cousin, with three ships. . . The fleet of Santo Domingo [that of Las Alas] up to this day has not arrived at Havana." (Menendez, Vol. II, page 110.) Las Alas reached Havana early in January. (Meras, Vol. I, page 149.)

Further and conclusive evidence is contained in a letter written by Menendez from St. Augustine on October 15, 1566, to a Jesuit friend, in which he says: "I felt lost on finding that no members of the Religious order had arrived. . . I am sure that members of the Religious orders could accomplish more in one month teaching the Doctrine than military men can accomplish in many years. . . I have sent a few boys and soldiers to teach them the Christian Doctrine. . . It has been a great mistake that none of your Order *nor any other Religious* have come to teach them."—*Ninguno de Vuestras mercedes ni otros Religiosos.*" (Historia de la Compañía de Jesus en la provincia de Toledo, tomo 2, folio 153.)

From all of which it is manifest that in 1565 there were no Franciscans in St. Augustine either to build the house or to occupy it. The Society's assertion that the house was built by Franciscan monks and occupied by them in 1565 is thus shown to be untrue.

### CONDITIONS IN 1565 PRECLUDED HOUSE BUILDING.

Nor is it credible that the house should then have been built by others, for conditions at the post in 1565 were such as to preclude the work of constructing stone houses. St. Augustine was then a fortified camp, governed by the Maestre de Campo, the camp master. From the shelter of the camp the soldiers and others ventured at their peril

because of the hostile Indians. They were in constant fear of the savages, short of rations, chronically hungry, mutinous and plotting to leave the country.

On October 15, 1565, Menendez wrote to the King: "From the burning of the Fort we suffer very great hunger, and the biscuit that was landed here is spoiling and being used up and unless we are speedily succored we shall suffer and many will pass out of this world from starvation." (Menendez, Vol. II, page 101.)

In November he went to Cuba for supplies. On December 5th he wrote from Matanzas to the King: "I shall do everything in my power to send on provisions for the people there . . . for they have nothing there to eat. . . Unless they can be succored or unless God sustains them, one of two things must happen, either they will perish with hunger or break with the Indians on account of taking food from them." (Menendez, Vol. II, page 106.) He despatched a ship from Havana with provisions and supplies.

On January 30, 1566, in a letter to the King he reported: "Two days ago arrived Captain Diego de Amaya, who sailed . . . with provisions for the Forts of St. Augustine and San Mateo, and he brought me news that he arrived safely at Fort St. Augustine . . . that in the cold of winter being ill clothed more than one hundred persons [at the two Forts] died, and that they were in very great necessity of food and still are." (Menendez, Vol. II, page 144.)

It is not to be believed that people who were starving, dodging Indians and plotting to get away, were over on Anastasia Island, quarrying coquina, transporting it across the bay and building houses of it.

While it is not to the purpose to follow the fortunes of St. Augustine during the years immediately succeeding, the fact is suggestive that the same conditions of hardship continued. In 1570, when Las Alas returned to Spain with some of his soldiers to report on the conditions then existing in Florida, Geronimo de Sobrado testified that there were divided among the three forts 150 soldiers, and in St. Augustine there were one married man and his wife. There were fifteen or sixteen mares in St. Augustine, and ten or twelve cows. "They cannot maintain them because the mosquitoes eat them up and the Indians kill them. There are no vegetables. There is fish, but those who go fishing are always in danger of being killed by the Indians." Francisco Duarte testified as to St. Augustine: "The soldiers are poorly armed. They have used their armor for shirts, not having anything else to wear. They need everything. In San Pedro the soldiers are also naked. In Santa Elena the soldiers are in the same condition. Among all the fifty soldiers of each fort there are not six shirts"—*no habia seis camisas* (Diligencias hechas en Sevilla con motivo de la venida de Esteban de las Alas, de la Florida. Ruidiaz, Vol. II, pp. 572-579).

## Claim B—That the house built in 1565 was built here.

In 1565 there was no St. Augustine here. A house built in the St. Augustine of 1565 would have been built not here, but somewhere else, for St. Augustine then occupied a different site, as is shown by the records.

From Cuba where he had gone in 1565, Menendez sailed on February 25, 1566, to explore southern Florida. He returned to St. Augustine in March and afterwards went to visit San Mateo and Santa Elena. In May he returned to St. Augustine. Barrientos (page 115) records: "He arrived in St. Augustine on May 18th, his arrival causing much joy, for they certainly were much afflicted with hunger and worn out by the fighting with the Indians. Entering in council with the captains, it was agreed to move the Fort from there to the entrance of the inlet, because there the Indians could not do so much damage, and they could the better defend themselves against the entrance of enemy vessels. . . The following day they went to the inlet and traced the site of the Fort, which they began building with great industry . . . with an understanding of the haste required in building the Fort. They worked with perfect order, fearing the Indians would surprise and assault them. In ten days the defense was moderately secure, the artillery in position. Up to that time no vessel with the relief had arrived. They were in danger of starvation."

In May of the following year (1567) Menendez returned to Spain. Before sailing from St. Augustine he ordered the building and garrisoning of a number of blockhouses. One of these was to be erected at Palican on the Matanzas River, 5 leagues south of St. Augustine, another at Seloy, and another in Old St. Augustine—(*Sant Agustín el biejo*, "St. Augustine the old," or as we would say, Old St. Augustine). "These houses he ordered built in these places because they were their enemies and had never wished to make friends with the Christians."—*Otra En Sant Agustín El biejo con sus soldados: estas casas mandava hacer en estas partes, porq eran de Enemigos q nunca auian querido la Amistad de los xpistianos.* (Barrientos, page 141.)

"The houses and people in Seloy, Old St. Augustine, Palican and Matanzas were to be subject and obedient in all things ordered by the mayor and governor of the Fort of St. Augustine." *Las casas y gente q estubiesen en solo in, Sant Agustín El biejo, palican y matanzas Estubiesen subgetos y obedientes para todo lo que les mandase y ordenase El alcayde y governador del fuerte de Sant Agustín.* (Barrientos, page 142.)

The site of the first St. Augustine is not known. That it must have been at a distance from the new site, to which it was moved in 1566, is indicated by the fact that it was so far away as to require its own fortification and garrison. When Romans wrote in 1776 the belief

was that the original site of the town was at Moultrie, a point some five miles south. "We next meet the mouth of St. Nicholas creek, on the point to the north of which the first town was built by the Spaniards, but they soon removed it for conveniency's sake to its present site: on the south point is a plantation belonging to Mr. Moultrie, the present Lieutenant-Governor." (Bernard Romans, Concise Natural History of East and West Florida, 1776, page 266.) B. F. French says that St. Augustine was built "south of where it now stands on St. Nicholas creek." (Historical Collections of Louisiana and Florida, N. S., Vol. I, page 234.)

Wherever the location was, the record shows that a house built in the Old St. Augustine (*Sant Agustin el biejo*) of 1565 could not have been built here on St. Francis street in the new situation of the city.

## Claim C—That the house was built of coquina in 1565.

A house in the St. Augustine of 1565 would have been built of wood, for coquina was then unknown. The rock was not discovered until 1580.

In the Archives of the Indies (*Relaciones de los Sucesos en la Florida*) it is recorded under the year 1580 that "Martinez Avendaño, being Governor of Florida, wrote to the King: 'I have to inform your Majesty that on the Island called Anastasia we have discovered a rock or stone of shell formation of which there will be enough to build the foundation of the Fort.'" This record Mrs. Annie Averette tells me was copied by Miss A. M. Brooks from the original in Seville.

It follows that inasmuch as coquina had not then been found, the house was not built of coquina in 1565 by Franciscan monks or any other builders.

If the house had been built of wood in 1565, twenty years afterward it would have been burned.

In 1586, on his way home from the West Indies, Francis Drake found a wooden town here. Writes Thomas Cates, who chronicled the voyage: "Going a mile up or somewhat more by the River side, we might deserue on the other side of the River over against us, a fort, which newly had bene built by the Spaniards, and some mile or there about, above the fort, was a little town or village without wals, built of wooden houses, as this plot here doth plainly shew." The "foote of the fort Wall was all massive timber of great trees like mastes." (*Summarie and True Discourse of Sir Francis Drake's West-Indian Voyage*, 1590, pages 34, 35.) A note on the "plot" says: "The fort was called Saint John de Pinos, which afterward we burned." They then took "the town of St. Augustine, which being won at our departure was burned to the ground." The account in De Bry describes the town as built of wooden houses—*ligneis aedibus exstructa*, and says it was entirely destroyed by the English by fire—*ab Inglis igne injecto plane devastata est*. *De Bry's Americæ, Pars VIII, Continens Descriptionem Trium Itinerum. . . Francisci Draken, Frankfurt, 1599. Tabula IX.*)

Barcia records that when Drake appeared the Governor retired to San Mateo, and that learning that Drake had gone on to Virginia, he decided to return. "He went by land with 200 soldiers to the town of St. Augustine, which he found reduced to ashes"—*que hallo reducida a ceniças*. "He brought back the inhabitants, sent for more people from San Mateo and began to rebuild or to build *de novo* the town of St. Augustine"—*y empoco a reedificar, o edificar de nuevo, la Ciudad de San Agustín.* (*Ensayo Cronologico*, page 163.)

The building material employed appears still to have been of wood, for thirteen years later a fire destroyed the church and the monastery. February 25, 1600, Fray Blas de Montes wrote from St. Augustine to the King: "In other letters I have written to your Majesty, I have given an account of the fire we had on the 14th of March of last year, 1599, in this city. Among other houses burned with the church was ours." (Unwritten History, page 57.) Five years later Governor Pedro de Ibarra was concerned about the inflammable nature of the palmetto thatched roofs. He wrote to the King Dec. 26, 1605: "There is another matter to which I give much of my attention, and that is to be able to make lumber shingles with which to cover the roofs of the houses." (Manuscript in Library of Congress. The Lowery Collection, page 114.)

St. Augustine has again and again been scourged by fire. In 1662 the pirate Davis burned the town. In 1702 Governor Moore of South Carolina after stealing the plate and ornaments of the church and driving all the inhabitants into the Fort, laid siege to the castle for three months, and then was "obliged to retreat, but not without first burning the town." (Report of the Committee of the South Carolina Assembly, July 1, 1741.) Barcia's account has the expressive phrase, *hecha Cineças la Ciudad*—"they made ashes of the city." (Ensayo Cronologico, page 320.)

Claim D—That it has documents proving possession of the house in one family from 1590 to 1882.

That the Society's house if built in 1565 should have escaped destruction through all these successive conflagrations would have been only less remarkable than the preservation of the documents which the Society says it has, showing the possession of the house by one Spanish family from 1590 to 1882.

The Archives of St. Augustine have repeatedly been destroyed by fire, and those which have escaped destruction do not go back of the year 1702. This was set forth in a deposition by the keeper of the Archives, who in 1763, testified in the land case of John Gordon. This case had to do with the estate of Palica, south of St. Augustine, the Palican already mentioned as the site of a blockhouse built in the time of Menendez. The testimony (The Case of Mr. John Gordon, London, 1772, Exhibit XXII) reads: "I, Don Joseph de Leon, His Majesty's notary publick for civil and military affairs, and inspector of the royal domain in this town and provinces of Florida, in the best form that I can, do certify, attest and give testimony that the archive of these provinces is in my custody, and it is in the same that must be deposited all instruments and writings about the deeds of sale and testamentary dispositions, as well as all those which relate to the rights and titles to lands and possessions.

"But it so happens that the said archive has suffered great damages on various occasions. The first was in fifteen hundred eighty-seven, when Admiral Drake, an Englishman, entered and burnt this town of St. Augustine, when the archive perished in the flames: The second in the year sixteen hundred sixty-eight, when the French sacked and burnt it likewise; and the instruments which were executed and registered from that time until the year seventeen hundred and one perished in the formal siege which Colonel Moore laid to this royal garrison, and who entirely destroyed the city by fire: and lastly in the year seventeen hundred and forty-four, when the house of the publick notary, Don Francisco de Castilla, which stood facing the sea-side, was set on fire, and a considerable part of the publick writings of the afore-mentioned tendency were likewise burned and destroyed: which publick writings were entrusted to his custody: but in the confusion that is usual in such cases, some papers were missed, many entirely burnt and consumed, and others stained and damaged by the water employed in putting out the fire: things of publick notoriety. The consequence of all those calamities was, that the said archive was deprived of almost all the documents that it contained: and although great diligence has been used in collecting many testimonials and vouchers of testaments, writings and other papers, which several of the inhabitants preserved and had still in their power, it was not possible to collect them all, as it is not the custom among us for each one to keep in his own custody the pre-

cise vouchers of the instruments which are authentically done, being satisfied that their originals are all preserved in the archive. . . I give the present certificate, dated in the town of St. Augustine in Florida, October the first, seventeen hundred sixty-three.

JOSEPH DE LEON,

"His Majesty's notary publick for civil and military affairs."

If under such circumstance the Society has real estate records extending back to 1590, the documents must be counted as unique, and are to be classed among the rarest and most interesting of its possessions. That the papers have added interest because of the genealogical complications involved in them will appear later.

Not less remarkable than the preservation of the documents must be considered the continued ownership of the house in the same family during such a long period of time and under the unfavorable conditions prevailing in St. Augustine. From its establishment and for a long period the place was small, scantily peopled and poverty-stricken. It was essentially nothing more than a garrison town, a fortified post, occupied by a transient military population serving its term of enlistment, here to-day and gone to-morrow. So late as 1690 a proposal was submitted to the Spanish ministers to translate the post to Santa Maria de Galbe (Pensacola), so few were the inhabitants here and so hard the conditions of living. That a government official's family should have remained and perpetuated its line as a family for three hundred years appears extremely improbable.

The improbability is heightened when we consider the successive complete changes of population, with the accompanying summary race interruptions, which have taken place. When Great Britain acquired possession, it was after almost a hundred years of racial enmity and warfare between the English of South Carolina and Georgia and the Spaniards of Augustine; and when the hated British came to occupy St. Augustine in 1763 the Spaniards went away. The Treaty guaranteed religious freedom for the subjects of the two nations, but the British oath of allegiance involved abjuration of belief in the doctrine of Transubstantiation. It is not to be presumed that the Spanish owner of the lot should have taken this oath. Twenty years later, in 1783, the Spaniards returned and the English went away, there remaining only the Minorcans and Greeks and Italians, who had come up from New Smyrna during the British occupation. Thirty-eight years afterward, in 1821, the Spaniards went and the Americans came. Spanish, English, Spanish, American—this is the story of change told by the three flags the Society displays on its house, each change of sovereignty and of race implying an interruption of family descent. Thus, while one may not say positively that the Historical Society's Spanish deputy of 1590 was not the progenitor of a line which persisted through the vicissitudes of these three centuries, it may at least be said that acceptance of the Society's assertion calls for a powerful exercise of the will to believe.

## Claim E—That traditions justify its assertions about the age of the house.

The Society has recently advanced a blanket claim that traditions justify its several assertions respecting the age of the house. In connection with the claim of documents showing the long possession of the house in the same family, it is pertinent to consider these traditions of which the Society now makes so much.

When I pointed out that the 1565 coquina house building monk story had no foundation in history, the Society rejoined that the tale was supported by traditions attaching to the house.

At the meeting of the Board of Trade, February 28, one of the speakers, who was also a member of the Society, said: "There has never been written a comprehensive history of Florida, and many of the claims made by all historians are based upon traditions." (Evening Record, March 1).

At the Society meeting of March 8 one of the speakers said: "We must remember that St. Augustine was founded 350 years ago, and for ages had no libraries or newspapers, which means that much of our history is based upon tradition handed down from father to son." Another speaker, with childlike and touching faith in what dear teacher had told him, testified that "he had been taught in school that Ponce de Leon landed a little north of Fort Marion, and he did not think that Mr. Reynolds should be allowed to get away with his attacks upon the Ancient City's treasured traditions." The resolution adopted at the meeting asserted the Society's faith that its statements about the house were "as near the facts as true lovers of history can establish from meagre historical records and priceless traditions handed down from father to son." (Evening Record, March 9.)

A member of the Society and of the Board of Trade wrote me March 11: "I do feel, as do scores of others here, that you have been unfair to every business interest in St. Augustine by your attacks upon our greatest asset—our history and cherished traditions." Another member wrote March 29: "It seems to me that the discussion can best be decided upon the actual facts available which bear upon the antiquity of St. Augustine buildings. In the absence of such facts, generally accepted traditions should, it seems to me, have almost equal weight with historical data."

The handing down of traditions from father to son through the course of St. Augustine's centuries of change would have been subject to the same unfavorable conditions that have been noted as affecting adversely the continuance of an unbroken line of family descent. The circumstances precluding the one would have precluded the other.

If the monk house-building story had been known to the lone married man of 1570 and handed down to his son (supposing he had a son) and thus started on its way as a tradition, it would have had but precarious chance of keeping itself alive through the succeeding generations, to that far-off day when it should be set on its feet by a Historical Society and a Board of Trade. If the tradition had indeed been handed down to these times, it would have been familiar, if to anybody, certainly (one might think) to the owners of the house in the line of descent from the deputy of 1590 to 1882. But that the owners at the close of that period had no knowledge of the tradition is indicated by what is told of Miss Nica Llambias in a subsequent page.

The tradition that the St. Francis house was the oldest one here did not prevail in St. Augustine in 1869; for Dr. Daniel G. Brinton recorded that another house was then considered the oldest in the city. (Guide Book to Florida and the South. Philadelphia. 1869. Page 67.)

However all this may be, the question of the validity of the Society's claim of traditions attaching to its house is of no importance, because the Society's recourse to tradition is altogether unnecessary. The present owners of the house tell us that they have documents proving possession in the same family from 1590 to 1882. Having this direct documentary evidence, the Society needs only produce the documents, and on the instant by such proof positive establish the truth of the Spanish deputy family claim, vindicate its own good faith, and confound anyone who has had the temerity to accuse it of fraud. Instead of doing this obviously sensible and convincing thing, the Society now tells us that its claims respecting the house on St. Francis street rest not on documentary evidence, but on traditions handed down from father to son.

The natural assumption in explanation of such a course (I do not say that it is the right assumption) is that the Society has not the documents it says it has. And the reasonable conclusion from this is that it is only because the Society actually has no authentic historical data to substantiate its claims, that it now invokes those traditions which are "cherished," "treasured," "priceless," and with history "our greatest asset," but non-existent.

Claim F—That the living room fireplace was here “in the days of long ago.”

A feature of one of the rooms is the fireplace, of which the Society’s souvenir booklet says: “In the main living room is a very large open fireplace, which now as in the days of long ago radiates a cheerful glow on cool days.” But according to the books, in the days of long ago they did not have fireplaces in St. Augustine.

When the shipwrecked Quaker Jonathan Dickenson reached St. Augustine on a bitterly cold day in 1696, the refugees, he relates, were received into the Governor’s House, and “seeing how extream cold we were, he gave us a cup of Spanish wine and sent us into his Kitchen to warm ourselves at the Fire.” And again, when clothing had been provided, “we put on the linen and made all Haste into the Kitchen to the Fire.” (God’s Protecting Providence, page 92.) If the Governor’s house in 1696 did not have a fireplace at which the frigid refugees could warm themselves in such weather (Dickenson records “ice half an Inch thick” the next morning), it is improbable that the monks of St. Francis should have enjoyed that solace in their house in the hard winter of 1565-6, when Menendez recorded such suffering here from the cold.

The writers in British times recorded that chimneys were introduced by the English.

Wm. Stork (1769) wrote: “The winters are so mild that the Spaniards at Augustine had neither chimneys in their houses nor glass windows.” (Description of East Florida, page 2.)

Wm. De Brahm, Surveyor-General (1765), wrote: “No house has any chimney or fireplace. The Spaniards made use of stone urns, filled them with coals left in their kitchens in the afternoon, and set them at sunset in their bedrooms to defend themselves against those winter seasons which required such care.” (Manuscript in Library of Harvard University.)

Romans (1775) wrote: “Till the arrival of the English, neither glass windows nor chimneys were known here.” (History of Florida, page 262.)

The Hessian surgeon Johann Schoepf here in 1784 wrote: “The houses are built quite after the Spanish fashion, with flat roofs and few windows. Here and there the English have houses with more windows, especially on the street side. They also built the first chimneys, for the Spanish formerly were content with no more than a charcoal fire placed under a tapestry hung table.” (Reise durch einige der mittlern und südlichen Vereinigten Nordamerikanischen Staaten nach Ost-Florida und den Bahama-Inseln. Morrison’s translation, Vol. II, 229.)

The fact that a house has a fireplace to radiate a cheerful glow is presumptive evidence that the house was built after the British took over St. Augustine. Nevertheless, it may be that its fireplace is one thing about which the Historical Society has told the truth. For "the days of long ago" is a relative term, particularly with reference to fireplaces. It may refer back to the monks' house of 1565, or it may not go beyond the lives of living men. For when one recalls in after years the group about the fireplace in the old home, there needs have been no long lapse of time to give the picture place far back in "the days of long ago." If we thus measure the phrase, not by historical periods, but by individual experience, it may perhaps be conceded that this one claim is valid.

## THE HOUSE WAS NOT HERE IN 1778.

Our examination of the historical records has shown us that in 1565, when the Society claims its house was built by Franciscan monks, there were here no monks, no known coquina, no St. Augustine.

We now come to later and documentary evidence bearing on the inquiry. First and most important is the British Crown grant of the lot on which the house stands.

The Treaty of Paris in 1763, by which Great Britain acquired Florida, provided with respect to Spanish landowners: "His Britanick Majesty further agrees that the Spanish inhabitants . . . may sell their estates provided it be to his Britanick Majesty's subjects, and bring away their effects as well as their persons without being restrained in their emigrations, . . . the term limited for this emigration being fixed to the space of eighteen months to be computed from the day of the exchange of the ratifications of the present treaty." At the expiration of that term the lands which had been abandoned, or of which the owners had not taken the oath of allegiance, became the property of the British Sovereign. A like procedure obtained at the change of dominion in 1783 with respect to the abandoned property of the British. By the operation of this rule the lot passed into the possession of King George III. Here was a certain break in title from any original grantee, whether the Society's Spanish deputy of 1590 or another. From King George III. the lot was transferred to Joseph Peavett by Crown grant in 1778. The instrument of the grant was for a long time in the possession of the late Miss Nica Llambias, who lived on St. Francis street. Mrs. Averette's statement of the terms of the grant was printed in my article on "The Fakes of St. Augustine," as follows:

"It was originally part of a grant given by George III. to Joseph Peavett, and is called in the grant 'Town lot No. 9, Society Quarter.' The grant is recorded in the Register's office in England, Book D, Fol. 2, pages 46 and 47, May 1st, 1779, and is entered in the Auditor's office Book A, page 2, Aug. 12th, 1781.

"The grant provides that the grantee must pay yearly and every year one peppercorn if demanded; that he must build within three years next after the date, July 16, 1778, one good and sufficient tenantable house with brick chimney at least, and of the dimensions of 24 feet in length in front and at least 16 feet in breadth or depth. If the lot was not built on in that time, the grantee and his heirs must pay to the Crown £1 yearly and every year until the house was completely finished. If not finished in ten years, the lot granted must revert to the Crown. The instrument was given under the Great Seal of East Florida by Gov. Patrick Tonyn, July 16th, 1778." Mrs. Averette has written me that

she took these details from the original document, when Miss Llambias had it. W. W. Dewhurst, Esq., of St. Augustine, who has seen the original grant itself, informs me that the details as printed are correct—"the grant in terms requires that the grantee must build within three years next after July 16th, 1778, one good and sufficient tenantable house." And he adds that the plot accompanying the grant "shows a large vacant lot fronting on St. Francis street and bounded east by an open space facing the water."

The fact that the plot of the grant shows a vacant lot, and the stipulation in the grant that a house must be built on the lot to perfect the title, would seem to indicate that the Society's house built by the Franciscan monks in 1565 and the home of many Spanish and English families was not standing here in 1778.

#### THE PEAVETT GRANT

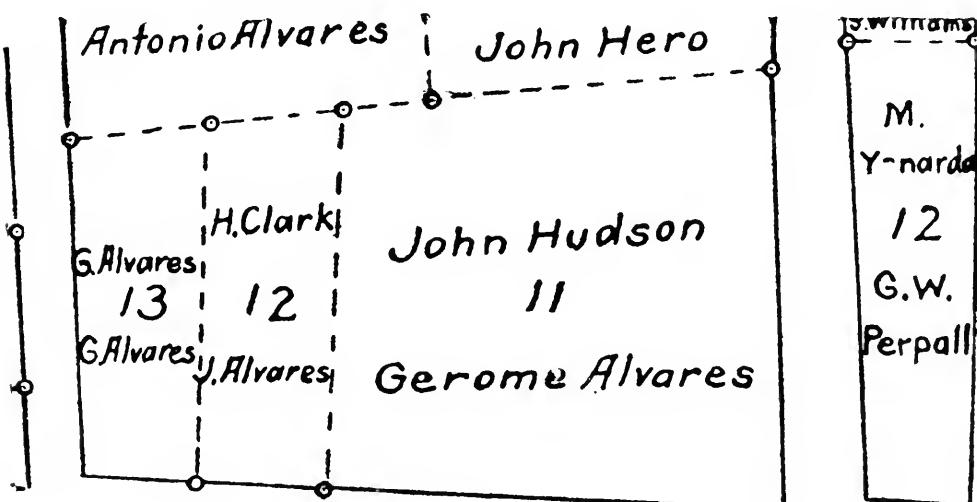
The history of the original document of the Peavett grant is interesting. It passed to Geronimo Alvarez when he acquired the lot, and in later years was one of the treasured possessions of Miss Nica Llambias, a niece of Antonio Alvarez. (Incidentally, Mrs. Averette has told me that Miss Llambias was much exercised over the misrepresentations made about the age of her uncle's house, and often so expressed herself to Mrs. Averette.)

In 1910, when the subject of St. Augustine's oldest houses was under discussion, Mrs. Averette published the foregoing terms of the grant in the St. Augustine Evening Record, and said that shortly before that time the document had been stolen from Miss Llambias. Again in 1918, when the Society was considering the purchase of the oldest house business, Mrs. Averette sent to the Society the same statement of the terms of the Peavett grant, to show that as to age the house was not what was claimed for it. Mr. Dewhurst tells me that since that time the original document itself, bearing the Great Seal of the Province of East Florida, has been sent to the Society, having been mailed to it anonymously. Unless then the Society has made some disposition of the paper, it has long had and now has in its own possession unanswerable documentary evidence that its house was not built by Franciscan monks in 1565.

## WHEN WAS THE HOUSE BUILT?

This examination of the historical and documentary evidence in the case having shown that the claims of the St. Augustine Historical Society are fictitious, I am not called on to determine actually when the house was built. Such records as are available will give the approximate date.

During the British occupation, in the year 1778, as we have seen, the vacant lot was acquired by Joseph Peavett. It afterward passed to John Hudson, for the Spanish archives received by the United States at the cession in 1821 show that when the abandoned property of the English was sold by the Spanish Government in 1783 this lot was sold as the property of John Hudson and was bought by Geronimo Alvarez. Mr. Alvarez remained in St. Augustine after the cession to the United States in 1821, and continued to hold the property. Mr. Dewhurst tells me that in 1831 the city tax assessor valued the small lot at the corner of Charlotte and St. Francis streets at \$1,800; the small lot between that one and the Alvarez lot at \$400, and this large Alvarez lot at \$300, a value which would indicate either that there was no house on it, or that any house must have been a very poor one. The original appraisal signed by Antonio Alvarez and Andrew Anderson is in the office of the St. Johns County Abstract Company. The relative areas of the three lots and the significance of their comparative valuations may be appreciated by a reference to the Clements map of 1835, the original of which is in Tallahassee.



Reproduction, same size, from "Plan of the City of St. Augustine," by Benj. Clements and I. B. Clements, Deputy Surveyors, 1834-35. Scale 80 feet to inch. Showing dimensions of the lots under appraisal. The appraisals were: No. 13—\$1,800; No. 12—\$400; No. 11—\$300.

Some time prior to 1834, the stone of the old powder magazine and other buildings, which stood south of where the Flagler Hospital is now, was sold by the War Department. A purchaser of building material at this sale was either Geronimo Alvarez or his son Antonio (the records of the Department will show which, as well as the precise date). The fair assumption is, and I am told that the current belief among the old residents of St. Augustine in the 1880's was, that the stone then purchased was used by Mr. Alvarez to build his St. Francis street house. It is known that Mr. Alvarez had two slaves who were stone masons. While the data here afforded do not fix the date precisely, they do lead to the conclusion that the house was built between 1831 and 1834. In 1839 Geronimo Alvarez deeded the property to his son Antonio, from whom it descended to his grand-daughter, Mrs. Acosta, by whose husband and administrator it was sold in 1882, as has been related.

#### THE GENEALOGICAL MIX-UP IN THE SPANISH FAMILY.

This brings us to the close of the long period from 1590 to 1882, during which (as the Society says it has documents to show) the house "descended in the same family." The genealogical mix-up we spoke of is this. The German George III. and the English Joseph Peavett and John Hudson, according to the Society's "same family" documents, must have been descendants of the Spanish deputy of 1590, and the Greek Geronimo Alvarez and his descendants to 1882 must have descended from the Spanish deputy, the German George III., the English Joseph Peavett and the English John Hudson.

#### WHEN THE HOUSE BECAME "THE OLDEST."

At the sale by order of the court in 1882, the property was bought by William Duke, who afterwards conveyed it to the wife of Charles P. Carver. Dr. Carver enlarged the building and added the tower room, put in the colored glass windows from the old Presbyterian Church, decorated the exterior with sea shells of a form venerated by some savage tribes, set up in the yard the plaster casts from the Howard place, gave out that the house was the oldest in the United States, exacted from tourists an admission fee to inspect it as such, and thus by his ingenuity and showman's enterprise converted what not long before had been an unprofitable negro tenement into an easy money producer. It is said that he paid off the mortgage with the fake "oldest house" proceeds.

From Dr. Carver the house passed into the possession of J. W. Henderson, who continued the business of oldest house. Then George Reddington ran it for several years. In 1918 he sold the business to the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science.

## THE SOCIETY AND THE HOUSE.

Prior to this, during the life of Dr. De Witt Webb, founder of the Society and its president until his death, it was at one time proposed that the Society should take over the house and conduct it as the oldest house. He spurned the proposition as a fraud of which the Society could not be guilty. What was written in the article on the "Fakes of St. Augustine" may be repeated here: "The St. Augustine Historical Society was organized in 1884, chiefly by the efforts of Dr. De Witt Webb, who until his death was its president and guiding spirit. His portrait occupies a prominent place in the Society's house. If the Society were minded to do Dr. Webb's memory justice, it might well post a notice in connection with the portrait, setting forth the fact that when fire had destroyed the Society's former home and it was proposed to take the St. Francis street house and continue its exploitation as the oldest house (as has been done since his death) he indignantly denounced the scheme as involving a deception of the public the Society could not be party to."

In 1917 when the scandal of there being so many oldest houses in St. Augustine was under discussion, the Society appointed a committee to investigate the subject. On hearing the committee's report at the November meeting of that year, the Society adopted a resolution which read: "Resolved, that upon the written report of the committee to investigate which is the oldest house in St. Augustine, the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science, from the report of the committee, just presented, cannot positively determine which is the oldest house in St. Augustine, but it is of the opinion, based upon the findings of this committee that the house known as the Geronimo Alvarez house is such." (St. Augustine Evening Record, Nov. 20, 1917.)

Evidently the records showing that the house had been built in 1565 by Franciscan monks and had descended in the family of the Spanish deputy from 1590 to 1882 were not then available. These presumably were discovered in the following year, for according to the Society's statement printed in the souvenir booklet: "After a careful investigation extending over more than a year of records, data and maps from Spain, the British Museum and the Archives at Washington, the antiquity of this building was established to the satisfaction of the Historical Society and Institute of Science, and in order that it might be properly preserved for future generations, was purchased by it on November 15, 1918." (Souvenir of the Two Oldest Relics in the United States, page 2.)

Under the new management the business thrived. The prestige of the title of "Historical Society" naturally served to strengthen the faith of the dupes who heard and believed the 1565 building date and the monk story. The St. Augustine Evening Record, which erstwhile had printed letters from visitors who thought themselves fooled, now

gave its own unqualified endorsement of the institution. In announcing the Society's acquisition of the business, it said: "There is no question about the antiquity of this old building, as the Historical Society fully investigated its claims to being the oldest house in the United States before considering the purchase. . . Much time and money has been expended in attempts to secure reliable data about the date that the old house was erected. The British Museum in London has been consulted and the Federal archives at Washington and elsewhere have been probed, the result satisfying the Historical Society that there is no building in the United States that antedates this time-worn structure. The old building was at one time owned by the Franciscan monks, who came here under the Spanish regime." And of the trumpery collection of antiques it said: "Under the Historical Society the exhibit of interesting relics will have an official stamp of accuracy that the public may accept as reliable." (St. Augustine Evening Record, Nov. 16, 1918.)

To this was added the official endorsement by the City Commission of the City of St. Augustine. This is displayed in the house, and is printed in the circular distributed to tourists. It is Resolution No. 116, "adopted in open session of the Commission this 17th day of December, A.D., 1918," and reads verbatim as follows:

"WHEREAS, The St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute for Science has become owners of the house on St. Francis street, known as the Alvarez home.

"In this old Alvarez home the Society exhibits an unusual collection of antiques, therefore,

"BE IT RESOLVED, That the City Commission in meeting assembled do request and recommend to tourists a visit to the Old House on St. Francis street." (Society's circular.)

The Evening Record's endorsement and the City Commission's recommendation and request to visit the place were given wide currency in circulars distributed to tourists. Drivers, chauffeurs, and sightseeing cars were paid so much a head for visitors brought to the place. Picture cards and books illustrating the house and the "antiques" were by the agency of the tourist disseminated throughout the land. The fame of the oldest house was spread abroad, and visitors flocked to it. In the season from November, 1918, to May, 1919, there were 19,000 visitors; and in that from November, 1919, to May, 1920, the register showed 23,000 "ground through" the house, as the attendants express it. The visitors are not confined to winter tourists. In a single mid-summer month, July of 1920, the Record reported, "950 people were shown through the Oldest House on St. Francis street, which is the home of the St. Augustine Historical Society. The visitors' register at the Oldest House indicates that they come from far distant sections of the country, from Maine to California, and from nearby points, little towns throughout Georgia and Florida." (Record, Aug. 10, 1920.)

## Claim G—That the well in the yard was blessed by the Monks.

Thus far in discussing the Society's claims we have considered dry historical stuff, not interesting perhaps to a historical society which goes in rather for the "priceless traditions" it talks so much about.

One of the "traditions," not "handed down from father to son," but handed out to tourists, is the story of the monk-blessed wishing well. A reference to the well was contained in a letter which Mr. M. S. Averette wrote me under date of March 28, 1921: "J. W. Henderson, who used to own the St. Francis street property, had a son Jay, who was one of my companions in St. Augustine. I well remember that Jay told me that his mother had had the well dug which now they use as a wishing well, and he told me too how some one had fallen into the well before it was curbed.

"As to the upper room now called the 'Chapel,' I one day said something about its being such a fine large room, when Jay told me that his mother had taken the partitions out and made it into a large room for him. I am sure that Jay was not a monk, and I never heard him speak of it as a chapel."

What Mr. Averette says about the well might be construed as casting suspicion on the Society's assertion that it had been "blessed by the monks," but as no remote date is claimed for the blessing, and as the monks of 1565-1590 are not specified, it might have been that some monks visiting St. Augustine after Mrs. Henderson had had the well dug bestowed their blessing upon it. Perhaps the unlucky wight who fell into the hole was a wandering monk who blessed it fervidly then and there, and wished himself well out of it. When one considers how many simple folk have peered into the well and wished a wish to be "granted within a year," one is inclined to indulge them the harmless delusion and to own that the story of the monkish blessing may be as authentic as are those which go with the "large solid brass knocker, which adorned the door of the Ponce de Leon palace at Seville;" the praying bench "used by the Franciscan monks during their occupancy of this house;" the sundry antiques the method of manufacture of which tells the trained eye of the wood-worker that they were produced at dates later than those specified in their labels; and the "Masonic table presented to Washington by Lafayette," which table has among its decorations two American flags, each flag bearing in the blue field forty-one stars, being one star for each State in the Union in the year 1795, when Lafayette sent the fraternal token to his old commander with whom he had fought under the banner of the Thirteen Stars. (There remains an interesting chapter to be written about this table with its 41-starred flags. The "antique" is illustrated in the Society's booklet, "Two Oldest Relics.")

## THE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE INQUIRY.

I have given such historical facts with deductions and inferences drawn from them as bear on the question at issue.

It has been found—

That in 1565 there were no monks here;

That the coquina building stone was unknown;

And that St. Augustine occupied another site.

The results of the inquiry lead to the conclusion that the Society's claim of great antiquity for its building is unfounded, untrue and untenable.

St. Augustine has had an eventful and romantic history, but in that history the house has had no recorded part. Nor do any traditions attach to it, not even of great age, for there are other houses here which are known to be older. The story that it was built in 1565 by the monks of St. Francis is a fiction of recent invention, invented and told for revenue only. The tens of thousands of tourists who have paid their admission fees to see the "oldest house" have been hoaxed. The age of three and a half centuries ascribed to the house is a fraud. The taking of money from visitors under the false pretense of showing them "the oldest house in the United States" is a swindle.

## THE OTHER ST. AUGUSTINE.

To say, as has been said, that the city's attraction for tourists depends in any degree on oldest house and kindred fakes, is an insult to St. Augustine. Untold thousands of visitors were attracted to the old town and found their pleasure here before ever the St. Francis street fakers faked their fakes. Other untold thousands will come long after the fakers shall have lived their little hour and been forgotten.

For these vulgar and impudent deceptions, engendered of ignorance and cupidity, are not the real things that count in St. Augustine. No more do those who invent and exploit and abet and defend the frauds truly represent the city.

The visitor may be "ground through" the St. Francis street house, Fort Marion and the Ponce de Leon mission, imbibe the parrot lectures and go away with a head stuffed full of misinformation about a fanciful St. Augustine and its past. But there is another St. Augustine of which he will have learned little or nothing—the place of genuine historic interest and truly romantic associations. When he realizes that he has been duped, he may look on the town as one given over to fakes. But, in this respect also, there is another St. Augustine (if not of to-day, nevertheless of yesterday and of to-morrow), a St. Augustine abhorrent of deceptions and intolerant of those who practice them.

The vendors of fakes, who have strayed in from other parts and set up shop here, do not represent the real personality of the community.

A Historical Society, ignorant of the history of its own city, and giving out grotesque fabrications as historic truths, does not represent the intelligent many who are familiar with that history and disgusted by the Society's perversions of it.

A newspaper, which finds itself sponsor for an undeserving enterprise, but delays to set itself right with its constituency, not only misses a fine opportunity to lead in vindication of the truth and of the honor of its home town, but fails as well to give expression to the real community conscience.

A Board of Trade, whose members when the fake shows are criticized sound an alarm that the town's business interests are being damaged, and which Board later when the occasion calls for action sides- steps any move to change the unsavory conditions, fails by such delinquency to proclaim the existence here of the rule of honest dealing, which as everywhere else so in St. Augustine is in force to control every legitimate business interest.

A City Commission, which goes out of its way to endorse by resolution an enterprise afterward shown to be fraudulent, and then pleads inability to counteract its endorsement of the fraud, because (as the City Manager wrote me the other day) "the city of St. Augustine is without municipal control in this matter," is a city government which by its indifference to the city's honor fails to reflect that civic pride, which I am convinced does exist in St. Augustine and when awakened will redeem the town from the odium brought on it by the individuals who are debasing its good name for their private gain.

There is another St. Augustine, and the time will come when it will be heard. The true St. Augustine will assert itself. In that day, of the fakes of St. Augustine it shall be written, "They were."

CHARLES B. REYNOLDS

130 West 42d Street, New York, May, 1921.

3477-250  
31 Lot 29

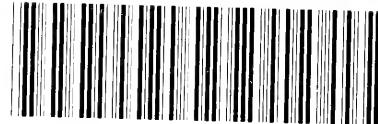








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